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Makin' It Easy to Say "Make Mine CrossGen!"

Some companies make it almost impossible for a newcomer to enter their fictional milieu—lengthy, continuity-heavy storylines, interrelated titles, crossover adventures... it's pretty murky territory! But the folks at CrossGen have taken the other route, implementing reader-friendly initiatives that make it easier than ever to take that first step into the CrossGen Universe.

Crossgen's Key Issue program "grew out of a conversation one evening with *Ian [Feller], Ron Marz, Mike Battle*, me, and a couple other folks who were hanging out after hours," CrossGen's *Tony Penuscio*, CrossGen's Vice President of Product Development, said. "The lament was that, as we embarked on new projects like Code 6 and CGE, our core line of books seemed to be getting less and less attention from retailers, new readers.

"Since our Sigil-verse books are the foundation upon which CrossGen is built, we started brainstorming that evening about some of the reasons why new readers might be reluctant to try our core line of books. Some of the objections that we came up with included the misguided notion that the CrossGen Universe is so interconnected that new readers can't understand any of the titles unless they pick up the line.

"Hence, the Key Issue program. With *Tony Bedard* taking the helm on the side of the creators to help us flesh out how our writers could help us eliminate those objections in a single issue, we established the program in this way: Once a month, one of our titles will be featured in the Key Issue program, and these titles will provide a done-in-one style story that still moves the overall plot of the story along, and also reintroduces a few of the key elements of the series. The gauntlet we threw down to our creators—and it's a tough one—was to design a story that does all this without six pages of recap, and without making our existing *fan*-base feel like they didn't get value out of the issue."

The program began on an experimental basis last November—but the experiment was so well-received that CrossGen has decided that it should continue.

Scott Beatty (who's writing April's Key Issue, ***Ruse #19***) and *Chuck Dixon* (who's writing May's key issue, ***Sigil #36***) took a few minutes to discuss the program with *CSN*. The first question related to the stories themselves: how difficult is it to create a story that has to please veteran readers and be new-reader accessible as well? "Ideally, a Key Issue touches upon most or all of the hallmarks which make series like ***Ruse*** unique," Beatty said. "It's both a refresher episode for continuing readers and a point of easy access for readers new to the book."

"It's best to begin a major new storyline in an issue like this," Dixon added. "No tired re-telling of origins or anything like that. Besides, in a forward-looking continuity like CrossGen, we don't really look back. My job on a Key Issue is to pull you into the ongoing tale and hope you like enough to stay to see what happens."

"It just so happens that our Key Issue falls at a time when we're bringing Simon Archard and Emma Bishop back to Partington—which is really the dominant setting of the title—and delving into a single-issue mystery," Beatty explained. "Given Simon and Emma's travails as late, it's nice to get back to what really boils down to a 'procedural' detective tale. Like many traditional mystery short stories, we begin with a murder and end with the crime being solved, albeit in a surprising manner.

"Of course, subplots abound. The through-lines of certain story aspects don't merely fall to the wayside because it's a Key Issue. Quite the contrary actually. Readers in both camps will find a wealth of material which will ideally bring them back for the next issue and, hopefully, many issues after that. Familiar characters are brought to the fore. While wholly new characters are introduced as we gear up for what looks to be our most exciting and jaw-dropping storyline yet.

"The 'nuts and bolts' are this: Simon and Emma return to Partington after their time as castaways on an island populated by angry monkeys, hungry gargoyles, and Miranda Cross. Ironically, most of Partington's populace think their favorite son and his intrepid partner are dead. Some are thankful for that, believing that Malcolm Lightbourne's attack on Partington was exacerbated by Simon. So, Simon's return to Partington is less than welcoming.

"Nevertheless, he's immediately called to action in investigating a murder considered open-and-shut by two new sleuths, upstart Iain Crombie and his own fetching assistant, Charity Wyndham. The mystery is complicated by a rather unorthodox love-triangle involving one of supporting cast members. Simon's findings have the potential to either extricate him from his public relations woes or further alienate the citizens who once adored him."

For his Key Issue, Dixon is assembling the old gang, offering readers old and new to see new artist *Dale Eaglesham*'s take on ***Sigil***'s crew. "For the most part it's a standalone story in which we present the entire cast together for an adventure. It's an event for regular readers, since Sam and Zanni and the rest of the Bitterlucks haven't been in one place for quite a while. It also serves as a perfect introduction as the characters catch up with one another. We get to see the brand new Bitterluck put through her paces as Sam rebuilt the ship in a past issue. We begin a brand new storyline here with a massive invasion from a mysterious and unstoppable force that threatens every living being in the universe. Never hurts to open *big*, huh?"

And of course, ***Sigil*** has one other selling point: the debut of aforementioned artist *Dale Eaglesham*, fresh from his stint on ***Green Lantern***. Dixon knows that fans are going to be impressed with his work on the opening action series. "He has the same sort of bravura style as *Scot Eaton*. Frankly, there's not many pencillers who would tackle this book with the verve that Scot brought to it. Dale was at the top of a list of *one*. I'd worked with him before (in fact we go back together to the beginning of our careers) and knew he had the stuff it took for slammin' space adventure. He's settling in nicely and has gotten off to a roaring start. Big ships. Big action. Strange critters. He's solid on them all. Dale has that mutant ability for inventing crazy stuff right there on the page and keeping it consistent."

Dixon is taking the "something old" approach by spotlighting a character from earlier in the series, while Beatty is introducing some new competition for Simon Archard in his Key Issue. Dixon offered a bit of background on Roiya Sintor. "Roiya is Samandhal Bey's old fighting partner in the first Human/Saurian interplanetary war. She's a tough cookie and his closest pal. But she died as part of the events that gave Sam his sigil power and turned him into his world's last hope.

"Sam kept her body in stasis in hopes of reviving her but Roiya mysteriously re-appeared as a holographic program wedded to the operating systems of the Bitterluck. In this form she runs the ship and does forward surveillance and (as readers of #34 know) many other services for Sam and company. But recently the corporeal form of Roiya has been resurrected and is causing headaches for everyone as the two Roiyas are constantly at odds."

Beatty's new addition to the cast is another master of deduction, Iain Crombie. "Iain is akin to a young Simon. He's eager to prove himself. He's building upon a foundation of bravado that edges dangerously close to hubris. Of course, he also knows that he could do well *not* to emulate models like Malcolm Lightbourne or Simon Archard. Obviously, there's tension between the detectives. Crombie has filled the gap left in Simon's presumed death. But now that Simon has returned, we'll find out if there's room for two master detectives in our fair city."

Beatty is confident that, once readers give ***Ruse*** a try, they'll be hooked on the book's distinctive elements. "***Ruse*** is by far the most 'alien' setting, especially when filtering Victorian-era arrays and sensibilities through our perceptions of a planet like Arcadia and a city like Partington. In many ways, Partington is more 'gothic' than Gotham City, where I've also hung my creative hat. But given the relative youth of a title like ***Ruse***, my collaborators and I are still really working on a relatively blank canvas. Part of the appeal for me is more fully realizing the landscape of Arcadia and its denizens. We've only seen a small part of the world and I've got many more places to visit both within and without of Partington with Butch, Mike, and Laura. Frankly, we're as much like 19th century adventurers as our set of characters, all of exploring the unknown with, at equal turns, awe and dread."

While the Key Issue program makes it easy for newcomers to catch up on CrossGen's current storylines, their other initiative—the ***Traveler*** trade paperback line, which offers a couple of hundred pages of comics in compact format at a bargain price. The response to the ***Traveler*** market test this spring was so positive that CrossGen is rolling out six more in June—and they're making it a permanent element of CrossGen's offerings. "Retailers love the Travelers because the smaller, portable size leads to an attractive price point—and that's one of the reasons readers dig them, too!" Crossgen Director of Marketing and Communications *Bill Rosemann* told *CSN*. "With each volume containing nearly two hundred pages, you're getting seven 'issues' for less than the cost of four comics! As for why they're so appealing…well, just look at them! They're so cute you want to pet them and give them a bowl of water!"

Rosemann can certainly understand why fans like the compact editions—in fact, they remind him of some compact editions that hooked him on comics. "Some of the first comics I ever read were the paperback-sized reprints of the first twenty issues of ***Amazing Spider-Man*** that Pocket Books published more than twenty years ago," he explained. "I always believed that this was a viable format and wondered why it wasn't being duplicated…well, leave it to CrossGen to be the innovators once again—and to make the format even better with quality printing on great paper! Many people were skeptical that CrossGen could reduce their books to the convenient size and maintain their artistic excellence and readability, but seeing is believing!"

With six new Travelers—***Ruse Vol. 1, The Path Vol. 1, Scion Vol. 1, Mystic Vol. 1, Sojourn Vol. 1,*** and ***Meridian Vol. 2***—coming up in June, is it safe to assume that CrossGen has decided to release all of its old trade paperbacks in this new format? "With major motion picture and television productions moving forward on nearly every series that we publish, I wouldn't be surprised at all to see additional titles make the leap to the ***Traveler*** format. This is a package that more and more young readers are demanding—and we're in the business of delivering high adventure at a low cost to as many readers possible!"

That doesn't mean the larger sized collections are going away, though. "We will definitely continue to publish standard-sized trades, with specific ***Traveler*** editions following months after their larger siblings are printed," Rosemann said. "However, now that you mention it, a simultaneous or initial ***Traveler*** edition printing is an interesting idea. We'll continue to consider all options…but first we have to keep the initial ***Traveler*** series going—because after they read the debut volumes, readers will be *clamoring* for more!"

Key Issues, Traveler editions... does CrossGen have any other plans to entice new readers to sample the CrossGen Universe? "The best way we can attract new readers to our comics is to simply get them into readers' hands and let them see for themselves how cool our books are—and that's exactly why we're participating in this year's Free Comic Book Day [with a special edition of ***Way of the Rat***]. Once they encounter the glory that is Po Po, we know they'll come back for more talking monkey madness! Plus, we're leading the book with additional features that will quickly introduce them to our entire universe of characters... But really, can you put a price on talking monkeys?"

Ruse #19, a Key Issue by *Scott Beatty, Butch Guice, Mike Perkins, & Laura Martin*, is scheduled for April 30th release; ***Sigil #36***, a Key Issue by *Chuck Dixon, Dale Eaglesham, Andrew Hennessey, & Andrew Crossley*, follows on May 14th. The next six Traveler editions are scheduled for release throughout the month of June. Each Key issue is priced at $2.95; each ***Traveler*** is priced at $9.95.

BY CLIFF BIGGERS

Courtesy your friendly neighborhood comics outlet!

Comic Shop Newsarama

Batmania Continues!

When the first reports of *Jeph Loeb* and *Jim Lee* on *Batman* leaked out, people scoffed. "Jim Lee on a monthly book again? Never gonna happen." But after the first few issues of Loeb and Lee's run on Batman tore apart the sales charts, people began singing a different tune. And as the book continued to ship on time issue after issue, it became obvious that it was happening—with amazing results!

And now, with momentum going strong, the duo have decided to keep setting modern-day *Batman* sales records a little bit longer, confirming that their run will continue for six more issues after the initial twelve-part "Hush" storyline wraps up.

According to Loeb, Lee had a desire to go beyond the twelve-issue story arc early on. "Jim had said from the very beginning that he wanted to do more," Loeb told *Comic Shop Newsarama*. "I'm more of a 'yeah, well, when I see it, I'll believe it,' sort of guy. DC was great about it—*Dan Didio*, in particular—about seeing what we'd need in terms of time and creatively. It was very soon after the first issue came out and sold out."

According to Lee, the idea of taking it past the original framework came a bit later. "I think it was when I had pulled out all the stops to make my deadline of 8 issues before the first one shipped," Lee said. "Even after the grind of making that first milestone, I still felt amazingly fresh and ready for more. In addition, I was very happy with how the story was building up.

"There were little things which Jeph had put into the first eight issues which were all coming together and I knew we had a good thing going. When you draw issue by issue, sometimes you don't see the big picture until you get well into the run—and so it was becoming increasingly apparent to me that this was going to be a lot of fun to wrap up. And after talking to Jeph about his plans for the second arc after 'Hush'—well, it was really a no-brainer. Great stuff!

"Right now, I'm just *ecstatic* that we have a killer lineup on this book from editor Bob Schreck to Jeph to inker supreme Scott Williams to colorist extraordinaire Alex Sinclair to lettering maestro Richard Starkings."

Both creators note that the six issues that follow "Hush" will comprise another story arc, rather than six stand-alone tales. Other than that, however, details are scarce. "My understanding is that it is another fairly stand-alone arc with a separate storyline which takes elements set up in 'Hush' and develops them in different directions," Lee said. "There are more details, but I leave that to Jeph to divulge. Or not."

Loeb took the relatively quiet road. "Very generally, it's another arc—this time six issues. All that we'll say right now is that it features Batman and Robin and will focus on a major character in the rogue's gallery. Mostly, the results of the 'Hush' storyline will play greatly into this storyline—although you won't



have to have read 'Hush' to understand it. Yes, those three of you. And we know who you are."

So is it true that the team will be taking an issue or two off between arcs? "That hasn't been decided," Loeb said. "We may plow right on through to #625."

If there's one person shooting for a break, it's inker *Scott Williams*. "The funny thing is that both Jeph and I were looking to go right into the next arc, but Scott came up to me and asked that we take a break," Lee explained. "When we started 'Hush,' Scott was inking both my work and *Whilce Portacio* on *StormWatch: Team Achilles* and he was always under the deadline gun getting *Batman* inked right under the wire. So, while I am comfortably ahead on the run, Scott is right there on the edge and any professional can vouch for how very tough that place can be.

"So Scott wanted us to take a break so he could get caught up and take a breather to recharge his batteries because he's been inking 24/7. Every penciller who has worked with a regular inker for a long time knows that they are worth their weight in gold so again, it was a difficult choice.

"And I *know* Bob Schreck will be happier not having issues come in right under the wire. There is no definitive decision that I know of—I'm actually in Italy for a convention right now—of how many issues the break it will be, but I don't expect it to be lengthy."

As for future post-*Batman* collaborations, both creators say nothing definite is in the works, but both are eager to work together again. "I know both Jeph and I have separate plans for lots of other projects in the works," Lee said. "Those commitments make working on any other projects in the very near future unlikely. That being said, I would love to work *with* him again in the future, and we certainly have talked about characters we have mutual affection for. It's all in the timing really. Jeph is one of the busiest writers in comics I know and I'm just happy we are doing another six issues of the Bat."

"Every day Jim has some new character he has a jones for," Loeb added. "I've said it before and I'll say it again, if Jim's on board, I'll be there. It's been a great partnership—not just with Jim, but the entire team with Scott, Alex and Richard. Put us in a box, wrap it, and we're ready to go."

Dark Horse Goes Berserk

Manga purists—those who prefer to read Japanese comics right to left, with minimal editorial alterations—will be very pleased with Dark Horse's new project, *Berserk*. Produced in conjunction with Digital Manga, *Berserk* will be released in three volumes in what Dark Horse describes as "a non-westernized format. Each volume will read from right to left and original Japanese sound effects will remain intact."

Dark Horse publicist *Lee Dawson* offered a little background on the horror-fantasy series by *Kentaro Miura*. "One of the most eagerly anticipated manga properties in recent years, *Berserk* was originally published in Japan by Hakusensha and has been serialized in *Young Animal Magazine* since the early 1990's," Dawson said. "An animated TV series followed in 1998 and Media Blasters announced a U.S. anime acquisition in 2001."

No word yet on the *Berserk*'s release date—but as soon as Dark Horse sets the schedule, you'll hear about it in *CSN*!

Tavares Gets the Spirit

CSN first told readers about *Spirit of the Amazon* back in our *Spring Preview* issue—but there's a lot more to the story than that was revealed in that issue and its publisher, NW Studios. Recently, publisher *Vinicius Tavares* took a few minutes to talk to *CSN* about the series—a best-seller in Brazil—and the company responsible for bringing this book to an American audience.

Spirit of the Amazon is the creation of *Orlando Paes Filho*. "The inspiration for *Spirit of the Amazon* came in 1978, when Orlando was sixteen years old. Terrified by man's violent actions towards nature he wrote a story called *Blue Planet (Planeta Azul)*, which later became the comic book series *Spirit of the Amazon*." After entering the comics field as a production manager for the company that published Marvel titles in Brazil, "Orlando founded NW Studio with a firm objective to render artwork services, style guides, brand manuals, and the creation of characters and properties. There is no doubt that Orlando's passion and experience in the comic market helped him in his new venture."

Spirit of the Amazon isn't a one-man effort, though. "We have *Rodrigo Pereira* as the main penciler of the book. We really, really enjoy his work. We also have *Charles Carvalho* and *Renato Munhoz* as pencilers... and there are five other artists who contribute with their talents: *Nelson Pereira* and *Jose Wilson Magalhaes* (inks), *Alexandre Jubran*, *Toni Caputo* and *Markus Correia* (colors) and *Toni Caputo* (letters)."

Tavares knows that most American readers are totally unaware of Brazilian comics. "Brazil is a big country—larger than the US if you do not consider Alaska—with a population of 170 million people. In terms of pop culture Brazil is greatly influenced by the US. Movies, music, comics—the US is *everywhere*.

"Comics in Brazil, as in the US, are not totally accepted as artistic expression. Of course (and thank God for that) a lot of people see them as art and really appreciate them. But society in general has a biased view towards comics. I would say it is similar to the US in that respect.

"In terms of the comics market, things are different in Brazil. The US comic market is 'well developed' in the sense of its distribution system... For us, who come from a comic marketplace where a consignment system is the only option and where the largest comic publisher (by far) is also the only and exclusive comic distributor, the opportunities the US market brings to 'new guys' like us is really motivating."

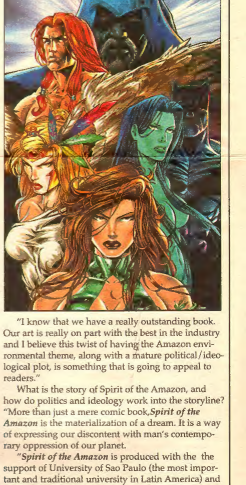
Tavares points out that NW Studios is not solely a comic book publisher. "Comic books are part of our business," Tavares said—a business that also includes advertising art, animation, and more." We started publishing comics after we were established as a creative agency... In 1998 we decided to branch out of our creative services and start publishing comics, as part of the portfolio of businesses of NW Studios Brazil. We have fifteen employees—most of them designers, artists, and computer experts.

"*Spirit of the Amazon* was originally launched in Brazil in 1998—it was our debut in the comic business. After becoming a national comics sensation in Brazil, becoming the second-best selling comic behind *X-Men*... the title was forced to discontinue production after four issues," when Brazil's only comics distributor refused to carry the book after their offer to buy the property was rejected. "We then focused on our other lines of businesses—but later in 2002 decided to expand and open a US branch office. We knew that comics could be a great thing for us in the US—so here we are!..."



"We brought *Spirit of the Amazon* to the US because the US is the largest and most influential comic market in the world. Concepts and trends are created here, and we want to participate in this hot market! Our objective is to contribute to the variety and depth of the U.S. comic market. This is the place to be! Furthermore, it is amazing how rich and diverse the US market is—which I see as something really positive because it inspires more people to jump in."

Rather than simply translate *Spirit of the Amazon* into English, NW Studios took the opportunity to enhance the book for its North American debut. "We did that to show how committed we are to the American market. We added new pages, expanded the book—issue # 1 has twenty-eight pages of story—and made the plot even more exciting! Once we decided to publish the book here, we put in a lot of time improving and refining *Amazon*. We wanted it to be perfect!"



"I know that we have a really outstanding book. Our art is really on part with the best in the industry and I believe this twist of having the Amazon environmental theme, along with a mature political/ideological plot, is something that is going to appeal to readers."

What is the story of Spirit of the Amazon, and how do politics and ideology work into the storyline? "More than just a mere comic book, *Spirit of the Amazon* is the materialization of a dream. It is a way of expressing our discontent with man's contemporary oppression of our planet.

"*Spirit of the Amazon* is produced with the the support of University of Sao Paulo (the most important and traditional university in Latin America) and SOS Amazonia. (a non profit organization engaged in supporting the world's largest rainforest.) Through input from their respectful doctors, researchers and activists, these two institutions collaborated with the development of the story, providing Orlando and his crew relevant and updated information about politics, law, and environmental issues. The outcome is a intelligent plot that in a thrilling and action-packed way explores what we call the 'bad side' of today's capitalism: corruption, drug trafficking, environmental abuses, corporate scandals, and diverting of public funds just to name a few...all of them forms of these undesirable outcomes of the system. The story is a criticism of today's capitalism in an intelligent and dynamic comic book about six under-covered extraterrestrial beings who face a long and terrifying battle to protect the earth from its tyrant leaders."

Tavares is aware that comic readers look for entertainment, not ideology. "We want *Spirit of the Amazon* to be seen not as 'boring ideological crap'

Publisher
Comic Shop News, Inc.
Editors
Cliff Biggers
Ward Batty

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Editorial Office
2770 Carillon Crossing
Marietta, GA 30066
fax (928) 441-5990
cliffbig@comicshopnews.com

Business Office
3577-A Chamblee-Tucker Rd. #215
Atlanta, GA 30341
(770) 939-1364
fax (770) 939-8898
wbatty@mindspring.com
http://www.csnsider.com

about how greedy and reckless human beings are, but instead to be something aimed to make readers reflect a bit on important stuff, provoke their minds, instigate their thoughts about the world while we nudge their way of looking at things!

"I think that there is a vast audience that ***Spirit of the Amazon*** may appeal to. Actually, I see different group of people being interested in ***Amazon***. Of course it is very politically-oriented in that it criticizes the bad things about capitalism, corrupt corporations, and alike. So people who enjoy the lyrics and the attitude of rock bands like Rage Against the Machine or U2 will probably like our message. People who really care about environmental aggression will like it, too.

"However, ***Spirit of the Amazon*** is not supposed to be this preachy book about how greedy and reckless human beings are. Instead we aim to entertain with stunning drawings—these Brazilian guys are awesome!—and a plot that mixes fiction with reality. And for that reason I believe ***Spirit of the Amazon*** will appeal to people who enjoy comics that mix reality and fiction in the same plot. In short, you can either open up the book and let your mind free without bothering too much with all the political messages, enjoying it as an adventure fiction about extraterrestrial warriors coming to Earth... or you can really get into some of today's most important issues!. Or both!"

While the book is critical of corporate greed and shortsightedness, Tavares stresses that it is not a blanket condemnation of capitalism. "We are not a procommunist revolutionary company, dead set against the marketplace. We believe in the benefits of capitalism, technology, productivity and so on—and the US is synonymous with. I wish the whole world could reach the same level of development US has, in fact!

"However, there are some really bad things about the system that could be avoided. *Orlando Paes Filho* is really concerned about these things: corruption, drug traffic, environmental abuses, corporate scandals, and the diversion of public funds, just to name a few. They're a part of the dark side of capitalism—and unfortunately it is something *real*, happening even as we talk about it. The truth is that Orlando has been thinking about these things for years, and they're a strong part of the comic."

While the book only ran four issues in Brazil before it was forced off the stands, "our intention is to publish ***Spirit of the Amazon*** as an ongoing series here. If we are successful in finding an audience, then we will be extremely happy to continue the series for years! For now, though, we are committed to publish the first four issues. And hopefully, in *five months* or so, we can tell you about the next phase of our plans regarding ***Amazon!***"

Even as NW Studios readies ***Spirit of the Amazon*** for release, the company is already looking ahead to its next comic projects. "NW Studios USA is a company founded to publish and promote only creator-owned titles. *Roger Cruz* has already jumped on board, and we are expecting to attract more and more talented artists to express their ideas, allowing them to release their creations the way they want. Roger's first project from NW will see release this summer... We also are pleased to announce Paes' second title: ***Human Resources***.

"And just to make it clear—we are *not* targeting only Brazilian artists.We welcome any talent from wherever part of the world. Hopefully we will be able to keep pursuing our dream. Right now, though, it is 'wait and see...'"

And you can see for yourself in mid-May, when ***Spirit of the Amazon #1*** is scheduled for release.

Rucka Lands at Logan

If there's one question *Greg Rucka* is getting somewhat tired of hearing, it's "Why did you take ***Wolverine?***" While it could be argued that the book is different enough from his creator-owned work, and even ***Gotham Central***, Rucka's almost getting a complex, thanks to the surprised responses he's received since Marvel announced plans to relaunch the series in May with Rucka on story and *Darick Robertson* on art.

So why *did* Rucka decide to take on ***Wolverine***? "You know, everybody keeps asking me that. I'm now beginning to wonder if the question isn't really, 'Why in God's name did they give it to you?'" Rucka said, laughing. But Rucka has a Logan game plan, and it's a simple one: "We're going to try to illustrate in different ways the stuff that makes him so cool—the stuff that made Darick and me Marvel Zombies when we were in high school. That's what we're after. This is our take on ***Wolverine***, which is clearly inspired by [*Chris*] *Claremont's* work. He's a guy who's so amazingly cool, and so tough, and just never stops. We want to get inside of that.

"Darick is a huge fan of Wolverine. He's practically a rabid, foaming fan of the character. It's kind of been through interacting with him that I've rediscovered my passion for him, because I had put it away quite a while ago. The more you look at Logan, the more fascinating he becomes. The more questions people try to answer, the more questions you have to ask.

"So yeah, the stories that we're interested in are the stories about him, what motivates him. Why does he care about this stuff versus that stuff? *Axel [Alonso,* editor] put it to me this way when we first started, when he said, 'These are stories about what Logan does when he's on vacation'" This is Logan's free time. This is not Logan with the X-Men. This is Logan when he's got three months off.

"The first arc shows Logan on a reading vacation. He's got himself a little crappy apartment in the city, and he's just going through a used bookstore. Every day he goes back to this place, he gets an armful of books, opens a six-pack, and he reads. When he gets hungry, he goes to the diner on the corner, where he eats and reads, and then he goes back and reads some more.

"Working at this diner is a young girl named Lucy Braddock, who's seventeen. She has a story; and Lucy kind of fixates on Logan because of two things that she sees. Lucy then makes a request of him. Logan, being who he is, and having made a connection with a woman, won't let it go. That's what the arc is about—how far he'll take it to right a wrong."

If it sounds like Rucka is steering clear of superhero exploits, then you're hearing the message loud and clear—but that doesn't mean that some of Wolverine's superpowered friends and enemies will never find their way into Rucka's stories. "Someone asked when I'd be using Sabretooth, and I said I have no plans. They then took that to mean *never*. I'm not willing to do that, to totally cut him out of the world he lives in. Darick and I have talked about issue #6 being a one-shot issue which is just Kurt and Logan drinking. I love these characters and their interactions, and you can't talk about Logan if you don't talk about his friendships, especially his friendships with the Elf and the other X-Men. His friendships are just as important as his conflicts with Sabretooth or whoever.

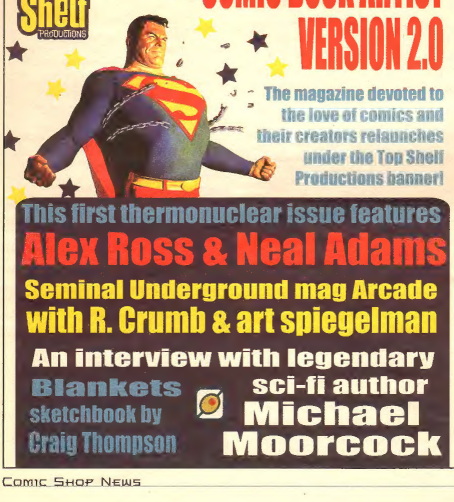
"One of the things that Darick and I *don't* want to do is retread. There are back issue bins for a reason. If people want Wolverine and Sabretooth fighting tooth and nail in a balls-out battle, they can get that anywhere. Until Darick and I feel that we can do something different, or we can say something that hasn't been said about that, we're going to stay away from it. Not because we don't like Sabretooth, but because it's been done. Nobody needs yet another Wolverine/Sabretooth fight."

Don't look for a wisecracking, boastful Wolverine in this series relaunch, either. "Our Wolverine is very still water that runs very deep," Rucka said. "He doesn't talk a lot, because he doesn't have a lot to say. This is a man of action, not words."

Logan may not have a lot to say in this new series, but readers will nevertheless learn more about the character, his motivations... and his frustrations. For instance, in the first issue, "He's trying to eat a piece of pie in a diner, and he's getting hassled. Darick and I have come up with the grand theory of Logan and pie—if you look at ***Origin***, and figure what was an easy, good dessert of that era, it was homemade pie. Nothing is going to make Logan happier on a real simple level, or that's going to bring a little smile to that that grizzled face than a piece of pie and a cup of coffee.

"So we've decided that he will never, *ever* get a chance to have a piece of pie. He may try, but if you see Logan sitting down to enjoy some pie, you know it's about to hit the fan. Logan likes pie. There's nothing wrong with that. Here's a guy who kills people with his claws, but he likes pie."

Another character trait that Rucka plans to emphasize is Wolverine's unpredictability. "I loved

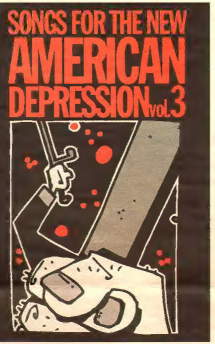




the fact that you never knew when he was going to go—but once he goes, everything else is going too. We wanted to make it clear that there is a moment, and when that moment happens, you know it, and at that moment, Logan just *snaps*. When he's done, everybody's dead. It's ugly. That's part of the character too—here's this guy who knows that's in him, and most of the time he's fighting it, but sometimes, he's willing to let it out. He knows what he's about to do, and he's going to do it anyway.

"It's one of those things where, if you've ever had those white-hot rage moments, where they just come upon you suddenly, like when you're in traffic, and a guy cuts you off. You're fine with it, until he starts yelling at you, and you're even fine with it as he yells at you for twenty seconds, but as soon as he yells that twenty-first second, or makes a comment about your family—you just feel the adrenalin jump, and you have to stop yourself from getting out of the car, and turning a traffic dispute into something much more ugly—that's Logan. You never know what the trigger is, but when the trigger goes, he can't fight it. It's too much. It has to run its course."

Find out just how unpredictable Logan is on May 21st, when *Wolverine #1* premieres.



A Noteworthy Debut

A lot of comic fans are also music fans—and so is writer/artist *Dave Morello*. Rather than keep his interests separate, however, Morello has found a way to blend the two in his graphic novel, ***Songs for the New American Depression Vol.3***.

Morello's Songs features comic translations of early American folk and blues songs. Morello doesn't think that fans will feel too out-of-touch with the subject matter of the graphic novel: after all, "songs contains four stories about the things which matter the most: love, death and war," he said.

So what motivated him to take a musical turn for his first graphic novel? "I am a long-time fan of early American folk music and the success of *Bob Dylan's* folk albums in the early 1990's and the recent success of *O' Brother Where Art Thou*—both the movie and the music—led me to search for new ways to communicate the traditional comic book story.

"I'm disappointed with the *Dawson's Creek* mentality of a number of the mainstream comics. The message of my stories are much closer to the Velvet Underground than Dave Matthews. I want readers to cherish this book in the same way they cherish a favorite movie or album. I want them to read it again, perhaps to learn something they didn't the first time. I want them to get something out of it." Morello explained.

Songs for the New American Depression, Vol. 3, a seventy-four page graphic novel, is scheduled for May release.

Spring's a Samurai Season at Image

As a part of its manga month, Image Comics is debuting a variety of projects with an Asian influence in April—but perhaps the most philosophical and metaphorical book on the Image schedule is *Will Dixon's* introspective four-part series ***Soul of a Samurai***... but Dixon promises that readers won't be greeted with a four-part philosophical treatise.

Soul of a Samurai, the story of a young samurai forced to give up his rank and honor while confronting his four inner demons on a quest to reach enlightenment, may seem a little heavy on philosophy, but Dixon says it's not something out of this world: We all experience the hero journey. "The hero's journey, and the quest for enlightenment are what drive the story," Dixon said. "Shinzu—the samurai—should represent the things that plague us all, and show the rewards and the dangers of the journey."

Dixon created the book's hero to be representative of everyone, he says. "He is written to be a reflection of everyman," Dixon said. "Hopefully people will immediately identify with the types of questions and the kinds of circumstances that he goes through. He really has no idea what he is doing at first, but the more he keeps driving toward his goal, the more focused he becomes. He just gets hurt—physically and psychologically—a lot on the way."

The decision to seek out enlightenment is also something that many people can relate to, Dixon says. "How do *any* of us discover this?" Dixon said. "An event occurred that made him step back and really start looking at who he is. Then he just decided that he wanted to know himself...understand why he reacted in a certain way to certain things.

"He decides to throw away what he knows. And what he knows is safe, and heed the call to adventure. To do that, however, he must abandon his status and his rank, which is blasphemy to his family. So it ends up being much more of an ordeal than he thought when he decided to leave."

The four demons Shinzu battles aren't just run-of-the-mill baddies; they're actually a part of him, Dixon says. "The four demons represent the four different aspect of Shinzu's soul," Dixon said. "For him to be complete. he must meet and resolve whatever his issue is with each one. The four parts are the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. It would destroy some of the mystery if I say exactly what the particulars of each one are—but each time he overcomes the demon in question, he gets that much closer to consciousness and understanding."

Soul of the Samurai represents Dixon's first comic work. "This is the first book I've ever put together," Dixon said. "I graduated from the Cleveland Institute of Art with a BFA in Illustration, and ***Soul of a Samurai*** was my thesis project. So this is the first time my work has been available to anyone." he fact that he placed the book at Image on his first timeout is indicative of the quality of this project.

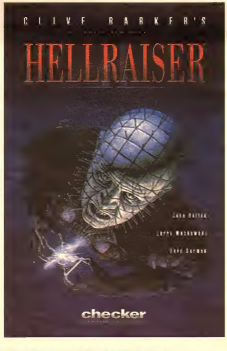
Dixon's influences are varied, he says, and each one played a significant role in putting together Soul. "As far as comics are concerned," Dixon said. "***Lone Wolf and Cub, Rurouni Kenshin, Blade of the Immortal, Vagabond, Calvin and Hobbes***, and ***Spirit of Wonder***. The story is influenced by *Joseph Campbell* and *Richard Bach* mainly, and a bunch of movies. *The Matrix* and *Fight Club* immediately pop out in my mind, as well as a slew of anime—most notably ***Akira, Cowboy Bebop***, and ***Hakkenden***. Visually, *Malcolm Liepkie, Yoshitaka Amano, Brian Froud, Hokusai* and Japanese woodblock prints."

Dixon is quick to point out the message behind the book: Enlightenment. "Seek consciousness!" Dixon said. "Life is the hero's journey, and we are the heroes and heroines of our particular stories. Myths help us to see the stages and the pitfalls, so I hope that these books can contribute to that. Human potential is only going to be what we make it."



As Dixon sees it, the book's look and philosophy makes it stand apart from the pack. "Metaphoric fights, thought provoking questions, Japanese patterns and some really interesting villains," Dixon said. "Every panel in the book is a monoprint. I think that this medium will be refreshing to those who are sick of perfect computer color, and traditional comic drawing and inking. The work is looser, and has a more painted feel. Also, comics are a visual medium, and I try to have the art move the story as much as possible. I despise word balloons. So it should have quite a different feel visually, and ask some pertinent questions intellectually."

Soul of a Samurai #1 is scheduled for mid-April release.



Checker's Raising Hell... Again!

Last summer, Checker brought *Clive Barker's* ***Hellraiser*** back to comic shops with a 232-page anthology featuring some of the best stories from the early 1990s Marvel/Epic series inspired by Barker's "Hellbound Heart" novella and the subsequent film series. Obviously, their Best wasn't enough, because fans wanted still more—and that's just what Checker is giving them this summer!

Clive Barker's Hellraiser: Collected Best II, a 196-page full-color trade paperback, offers ten more Hellraiser-themed stories produced by such creators as *John Bolton, Dave Dorman, Tim Conrad*, and *Ricardo Villagran*. These are not adaptations of the film or the novella; instead, they're original creations set in Barker's dark and foreboding world of desire, obsession, and infinite pain.

"Checker targeted book rights to the material due to its potential to appeal to both the comic book direct market and the general book trade," Checker Books' *Paul Dubuc* said, "where Barker was an established star as a best-selling horror novelist even before the film adaptations of ***Hellraiser*** became runaway hits and made him a household name."

Don't look for the entire Epic series to be assembled in trade paperback, however. "It's doubtful we'll collect *all* of the ***Hellraiser*** material, simply because we're trying to maintain a 'best of' luster.," DuBuc said. "Frankly, after a third collection, we think we'd see a quality drop that we want to avoid."

Clive Barker's Hellraiser: Collected Best II is scheduled for late June release.

TPs Coming Very GutSoon Now

For almost four months, Gutsoon has entertained manga fans with their hefty weekly anthology series ***Raijin***. But some readers have shied away from the anthology series, thinking they might not find enough material of interest to make the weekly investment worth their while—and the Gutsoon gang hasn't forgotten those readers!

Beginning in June, Gutsoon kicks off a line of trade paperbacks compiling some of the most popular storylines from ***Raijin***. The first volumes include: ***City Hunter Volume One*** by *Hojo Tsukasa*: "In the dark underworld of Tokyo, heinous crimes are committed against the innocent—crimes that the law won't touch. When these victims have nowhere else to go, they turn to mercenary Saebo Ryo—the City Hunter."

First President of Japan Volume One by *Tsugihara Ryuji & Hidaka Yoshiki*: "With the parliament abolished, the first popular leader of Japan faces an international crisis involving North Korea, China, Taiwan, America, not to mention his own country! Written by an advisor to the White House, ***First President of Japan*** is a taut political thriller with themes relevant to today's headlines."

Fist of the Blue Sky Volume One by *Hara Tetsuo & Buronson*: "The epic prequel to ***Fist of the North Star*** begins here! In the1930s, Kenshiro, master of the deadly assassin's martial art Hokuto Shinken, arrives in Shanghai to exact brutal revenge on the local Triads in the name of brotherhood! Can the King of Death survive in the City of Devils?"

Slam Dunk Volume One by *Inoue Takehiko*: "The megahit that sold over one hundred million books internationally, collected for the first time in English! ***Slam Dunk*** is the story of a rebel who may be the high school basketball team's only hope. Combining intense sports action with hilarious humor, find out why ***Slam Dunk*** is popular world wide!"

Each volume offers 190 pages of story and art in a compact 5" x 7.5" trade paperback format, presented Asian-style (right to left) for $9.95 per book. Look for them in mid-June.

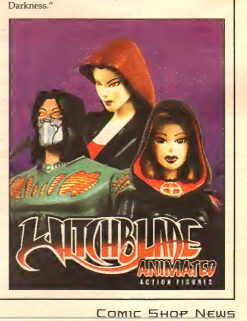


Witchblade Gets a 'Toon Up

Typically, once a comic book is made into an animated series, the publisher follows up with an animation-style comic to help introduce newcomers to the comic format. But the gang at Top Cow doesn't do *anything* typically...

This summer, Top Cow Productions kicks off a one-two animation punch with an animation-style ***Witchblade*** comic and a major animation-style toy line starring Top Cow's most popular characters. So what's the only thing missing? An animated series!

According to Top Cow publicist *Elizabeth Brizzi*, "The initiative is being spearheaded by the launch of an "animated" style comic written by animation master *Paul Dini*, and with art by a studio's worth of artists headed by *Darwyn Cooke*. The initiative is also supported by a major toy launch from Palisades Toys featuring Witchblade, Magdalena, and The Darkness."



"This has snowballed into a much larger project," Palisades President *Michael Hare* said. "What started out as a unique interpretation of a great character base has become a major project for two companies."

"I'm thrilled to be doing this and it'll be fun to put my own little bit of a spin on the characters," Dini said. "I promise it'll be fun, it'll be dangerous, and there will be lot of surprises."

"Hands down, there is no one better to handle this kind of story than *Paul Dini*," said Top Cow editor-in-chief *Jim McLauchlin*. "He was our first, last, and only choice."

Joining penciller *Darwyn Cooke* on art will be ***Kim Possible*** storyboard artist *David Bullock* doing layouts and *J. Bone* supplying inks. "We were lucky enough to get some of the top names in the animation field to work on this book," McLauchlin said. "The result will be a great story, with an authentic style that looks like it jumped off your Saturday morning screen."

Both the ***Witchblade Animated*** comic and the Palisades toy line are scheduled for early August release. And what about that animated series to go along with the comic and toys? As soon as there's news on that front, you'll hear about it in *CSN*!



Abrigo's On Guard

Kirk Abrigo's interest in Japanese culture led him to wonder how a traditional feudal Japanese culture might survive in modern times—and thus ***Samurai Guard*** was born. The series, set on an island where expatriate samurai have maintained their feudal culture uncorrupted for centuries, is an high-energy saga filled with martial arts action galore as the Samurai Guard attempt to wield off attacks from the outside world.

This spring, writer/artist Kirk Abrigo wraps up his first story arc in ***Samurai Guard #5***. "In the first four issues, you met a lot of the main characters and kind of got a sense of their roles in the series," Abrigo told ***Comic Shop Newsarama***. "In the final part of this story—which is not the end of the series by the way, just the end of this current storyline—everything that has been happening in the first four issues comes together for an exciting climax."

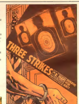
As always, Abrigo strives to blend cultural authenticity with adventure. "Fans who have read ***Samurai Guard*** always appreciate the attention to detail that is paid in representing the Japanese culture. Not only that, but they also love the storyline and the idea of an entire island of samurai who live in the ways of feudal Japan. It's an idea that has made ***Samurai Guard*** stand out from the rest of the samurai titles out there... One fan even told me he's 'never seen such a mix of action, adventure and great story telling in and Independent book.' That, to me, was the biggest of compliment, because I know they are some fine books out there."

Samurai Guard #5 has more action than any issue so far. "Imagine, if you will, two of the most powerful beings in the universe being forced to fight with nothing but their martial skills and human strength. That's the situation in this issue. Without revealing too much about the story before it comes out, the gods Raiden (Shinto god of thunder and lightning) and Hachiman (Shinto god of war), because of the spell placed on Nokami Mountain, have no godly powers at all. But they must fight. The outcome decides the fate of Bushido Island, where the Samurai live. Not only are two of the most powerful beings in the universe reduced to fighting like mere mortals, but they can also bleed and die like humans as well when on Nokami Mountain."

While this issue wraps up the first story arc, it's not the finale for the series. "***Samurai Guard*** will definitely continue as an ongoing series starting with number six," Abrigo said. "Only this time, readers won't have to wait so long between each issue!"

Abrigo has other projects in development as well. "I have a few plans in the works, I'm not at liberty to say what they are right now—but I can say that in the future projects fans will get the quality that they have come to expect from Colburn Comics"

Samurai Guard #5, a $2.95 comic, is scheduled for late April release.



DeFelippis & Weir Score With Three Strikes

Many readers first heard the names of writers *Nunzio DeFilippis* and *Christina Weir* when they were tapped as writers of Marvel's upcoming *New Mutants* relaunch. But the duo first made their mark with the taut, suspenseful ***Skinwalkers*** for Oni—and prior to the debut of their New Mutants series, they'll be kicking off a second Oni series: ***Three Strikes***, which centers around "three strikes" laws and their impact.

Just in case you've been out of the loop regarding US juris prudence, "three stikes" laws work more or less like this:, if you're arrested for two crimes, you do the time as prescribed by the court. If you're caught committing a third crime, proven guilty, and it fits the criteria set by the respective "three strikes" law, you go to jail—go directly to jail—for a lengthy period of time, with no parole. Proponents say such laws are effective in deterring crime due to the knowledge of the punishment that will follow the third crime. Opponents claim they're unfair in their application, as well as concept, and often the punishment for the third crime is out of proportion to the crime itself.

Into this mix, DeFilippis and Weir introduce one Rey Quintana—who's already got two strikes against him. "Rey is caught shoplifting and under California's Three Strikes law, he is potentially facing twenty five years in jail," Weir said. "Feeling he has no options, Rey goes on the run and Noah Conway, a Bail Enforcement Officer, goes after him to bring him in. We tell the story from both their points of view."

Three Strikes isn't going to be an *Elmore Leonard* or *Richard Stark*-style tale in which readers root for the criminal and see him pull off a clever last-minute escape while winking at the cop. DeFilippis and Weir aren't out to make *anyone* on either side of the issue comfortable as they read it. By telling the story from both points of view, ***Three Strikes*** encourages introspection regardless of your point of view on the issue.

"Rey Quintana is a Chicano living with a single mother in L.A.," DeFilippis said. "He's made some mistakes in his past, running with the wrong kids. But when the story starts, he's trying to make his life work. He's in college and has a job. He has a girlfriend and helps support his mother. He screws up one last time by shoplifting. And then because of the 'three strikes' law, Rey is looking at spending the better part of his adult life in jail." From Rey's point of view, the law seems harsh and inequitable.

But the man pursuing him has a different viewpoint. "Noah Conway is an ex-cop turned bail enforcement officer," Weir explained. "He left police work to spend more time with his wife, but they got divorced anyway. He has a sixteen-year-old daughter who hates him and who he has no idea how to be a father to. Noah is passionate about his work and the type of person who has no tolerance for the excuses of people like Rey. If he's hired to bring you in, he feels you deserve it."

Three Strikes is quite different from the duo's first Oni series, the Hillerman-esque Skinwalkers... but it's a work that's particularly meaningful to DeFelippis, who has strong feelings about the 'three strikes' law. "In general, I don't believe in laws like these. I have a hard time with a system that says to a criminal 'you are beyond hope,'" DeFilippis said. "The prison system is littered with terms about making criminals better people–'reformatory,' 'penitentiary,' and the like—but our laws move more and more towards just punishing and writing people off.

"Beyond the general problem I have with the law, the California version is exceptionally heinous. The previous strikes need to be 'serious' felonies. But the third one can be any felony. The circumstances we create for Rey may seem extreme, but they're not. There are hundreds of cases in California since the law passed... cases where minor crimes were upgraded to felonies—usually shoplifting—to make them third and fourth strikes. The Supreme Court just upheld the law, saying it was okay to sentence a man to fifty-plus years for stealing three golf clubs. That's crazy."

And essentially, that's Rey's problem in this story. "Rey's two previous strikes, while serious, were in part an attempt by him to help one of his screwed up friends," Weir said. "But they were 'serious' felonies. The part that's tricky is that the third can be anything."

However, in recognition of the views of those who support 'three strikes' laws, DeFilippis doesn't wholly discount their validity. "In general, I think people can see certain logic to 'three strikes,'" DeFilippis said. "If we're talking about violent felonies - murder, rape, armed robbery, assault... it makes certain sense that we crack down on repeat offenders..."

Even though it's clear that DeFilippis and Weir favor one side of the "three strike" debate, they have made Noah Conway, a proponent of the law, a character with whom readers can empathize. "Part of our goal is to keep him a valid, sympathetic character," Weir said. "We wanted to give a voice to those people who defend the law. Noah's point of view evolves through the story.

"I think at the beginning, Rey is more sympathetic. Noah isn't the big bad, but he works for a system that is doing Rey wrong. But these characters are on a trajectory and hopefully, if we've done this right, we suck you into Noah as much as we do Rey and you want to know where both these guys end up."

DeFilippis and Weir plan to readers' sympathies for Conway increase while their sympathies for Quintana decrease. "Part of what we're doing is showing that when we close off all other options, a person may very well become the criminal we assumed he was," DeFilippis said. "As the story progresses, Rey becomes less sympathetic. We want the readers to sympathize with what made him do what he does, but yet understand that he's changing."

"We were talking to *Brian [Hurtt*, artist of ***Skinwalker*** and ***Three Strikes***] yesterday," Weir added, "and he said, regarding the story, 'Everybody's got a valid point but nobody's actually right.' We took that as a compliment because it meant that we had avoided turning it into a polemic.

"This is probably a more political story than most, but it's also an arena that allowed us to tell a hunter/hunted tale with sympathetic characters on both sides. From a writer's point of view, that's rich territory to go into. Who do you root for?"

You can make that decision for yourself when ***Three Strikes #1*** premieres in late April.

Ins & Outs

In! *Clayton Henry*, who assumes the art honors on Marvel's popular alternate-reality mutant series beginning with *Exiles #26*, the kickoff issue of the two-part story arc "Hard Choices." Henry will join writer *Chuck Austen* for the arc, which features the return of Magik. "The name *Clayton Henry* may not ring a bell with readers right now, but in just a few months that's all going to change, and fans in the know can check out his first work in ***Exiles***," series editor *Mike Raicht* said. "We already have Clayton's first two issues in hand and it just gets better and better page by page. He's bringing a great animation flavor to the book and ***Exiles*** couldn't be in better hands. Fans are in for a real nice surprise." Exiles #26 is scheduled for early May release.

In! ***H-E-R-O***, which has sold out of its second issue before the book's release date—the second time in two months that the book has sold through a solid overprinting before its on-sale date. So why does that merit an "In" listing rather than an "Out"? Because a two-in-one bumper edition of ***H-E-R-O*** is in the works, that's why! DC is pulling out the stops to get the ***H-E-R-O Double Feature*** into stores this week, just ahead of ***H-E-R-O #3***, which is slated for release in two more weeks.

"Getting the ***H-E-R-O Double Feature*** out before issue #3 hits the stands is just the solution I was hoping for," *Will Pfeifer*, writer on the series, said. "Word of mouth is building on the book, and I'd hate for potential fans not to be able to get the issues they've heard about. This way, they can see where artist *Kano* and I are headed in the first two issues, then pick up the continued story just two weeks later."

"The momentum is building on this hot new series, and by shipping the ***H-E-R-O Double Feature*** so quickly we're giving new readers the chance to get in on the ground floor," *Bob Wayne*, DC's VP—Sales & Marketing, added.

Out! *Agent X*, which is coming to an end as of the twelfth issue.

In! *Gail Simone, Ed Benes, & Alex Lei*, who have been tapped as the new creative teamon ***Birds of Prey*** beginning with the June-release ***BoP #56***.

"***Birds of Prey*** is a dream assignment for me," says Simone. "Black Canary and Oracle have been two of my favorite characters for ages, and writing them is just dangerously fun. No matter what else, the readers are promised a good, noisy time. Our goal is to make the most entertaining DCU book we could, and we think it's going to be hot!"

"Gail's witty storytelling and powerful scripts are an artist's dream," editor *Lysa Hawkins* said. "At the same time, Ed's and Alex's work just gets hotter with every page. I am thrilled to work with this creative, lively team. And if Black Canary and Oracle aren't enough for you, just wait until Huntress... well, that's another story."



Out! ***Invincible #s 1 & 2***, both of which have totally sold out from Image. "It's great when all your hard work pays off and you get the feeling that people out there are actually enjoying what you're doing," writer *Robert Kirkman* said. "***Invincible*** means a great deal to both Cory and myself, and I'd like to continue with it for years to come. Right now, I'm just stoked to find out that I'm not the only one enjoying it."

Moore Fascinating Reading from the 'Net

If you've spent much time noodling around the internet, you've probably discovered that there's no shortage of fascinating reading (as our partners at newsarama.com demonstrate every day!). But many readers want something a little more permanent than pixels on a screen—and that's how books like Abiogenesis Press's ***Alan Moore: Portrait of an Extraordinary Gentleman*** come into being.

The book, a 272-page trade paperback, featuring contributions from more than a hundred comic creators, all paying tribute to Moore with both art and word as he celebrates his fiftieth birthday. ***Comic Shop Newsarama*** spoke with Abiogenesis chief Gary Spencer Millidge about the project.

The project, to which Moore has given his blessing, grew from a connection between editor *Gary Spencer Millidge* and "smoky man," webmaster of the Italian comics website, Ultrazine, wherein he has maintained a special Moore tribute since 2000. "The connection just kind of happened by a chain of events, almost accidentally," Millidge said. "'smoky man' interviewed me for his Ultrazine website after we met at last year's Bristol convention. He also posted and translated sixteen pages of the first issue of my self-published series ***Strangehaven*** into Italian for the site. He then asked me if I would be interested in contributing to the *Alan Moore* tribute section of the site which had been running since 2000. I said that Alan was one of my possible subjects for a series of short comic strip biographies which I was planning, but I would contribute a new illustration to the website.

"His response was to ask me whether I would be interested in having the biography published in an Italian print version of the website tribute, to which I

said yes. Later, smoky told me that he was planning an English-language version and eventually asked if I would be interested in publishing it under my Abiogenesis imprint for the UK and US markets. Imagining a thirty-two-page comic book format publication, I agreed. I cleared permission with Alan and we established the fact that all proceeds from the book would be donated to charities in aid of sufferers of Alzheimer's disease. But as soon as I started to think about the project, the possibilities became apparent and it quickly grew into the 272 page trade paperback volume that will be published in May."

The contributors to the volume read like a who's who of the comics industry, new and old, and include specially created comic strips, illustrations, essays, anecdotes, stories, poetry and personal recollections from *Michael Moorcock, Iain Sinclair, Darren Shan, Brad Meltzer, John Coulthart, Neil Gaiman, Dave Gibbons, Bryan Talbot, David Lloyd, J H Williams III, Kevin O'Neill, Will Eisner, Howard Cruse, James Kochalka , Adam Hughes, Peter Kuper, Jose Villarubia, Jimmy Palmiotti, Rick Veitch, Michael T. Gilbert, Steve Parkhouse, Nabiel Kanan, Bill Koeb, Rich Koslowski, Trina Robbins, Michael Avon Oeming, Sean Phillips, Jeff Smith, Sergio Toppi, Giorgio Cavazzano, Claudio Villa, Daniel Acuna, Willy Linthout, Jean-Marc Lofficier, Eduardo Risso, Dave Sim, Ben Templesmith,* and *Dylan Horrocks,* among others.

"We already had a number of pieces from the Ultrazine website, not all of which were suitable, and we quickly got together a wish-list of creators would we would invite to contribute," Millidge said. "Our criteria was that they had to be either of significant stature, or they had to have had some kind of relationship with, or interesting connection to Alan. We also wanted to reflect Alan's influence across the worlds of literature, film and music in addition to his comics writing, and also highlight his influence and popularity across the world of comics, so we have many international comics creators contributing to the book.

"Our success rate for securing contributions from our list was absolutely staggering. For various reasons, not everyone who wished to participate was able to, but the roster of creators we have assembled I believe is quite phenomenal—especially when you realize none of the creators are getting reimbursed in any way for their contributions apart from a complimentary copy of the book. But then you have to realize that Alan is one of the most highly regarded comic creators among his peers of our times. The book could easily have been ten times the size."

The book will feature an introduction by Monty Python alum and filmmaker *Terry Gilliam.* "I just wrote to him and asked him," Millidge said. "Terry replied by return, with his introduction included. What a star!"

Millidge himself will contribute a twelve-page biographical comic of Moore. "It's a highly compacted comic strip biography covering the forty-nine years or so of Alan's life so far," Millidge said. "It's by far the most intensively-researched thing I've ever written and making it breezy, comprehensive and concise has been a major effort. The art will be a mixture of cuttings, graphics, reproductions, manipulated photographs and new art which I hope will demonstrate how effective comics can be as a vehicle for non-fiction. It's a departure for me in every sense, but comic strip biographies have been something that I've been planning for many years now. I wasn't intending on doing Alan first, and in fact I had started researching a different subject before this mammoth project had been mooted. I hope that it will be both entertaining in its own right and provide a fitting perspective for all the various contributions contained in the book."

Alan Moore: Portrait of an Extraordinary Gentleman, bargain priced at $14.95, is scheduled for May release—and with all profits going to such a worthy cause, this is a chance to enjoy an entertaining book and help fund the war against Alzheimer's as well!

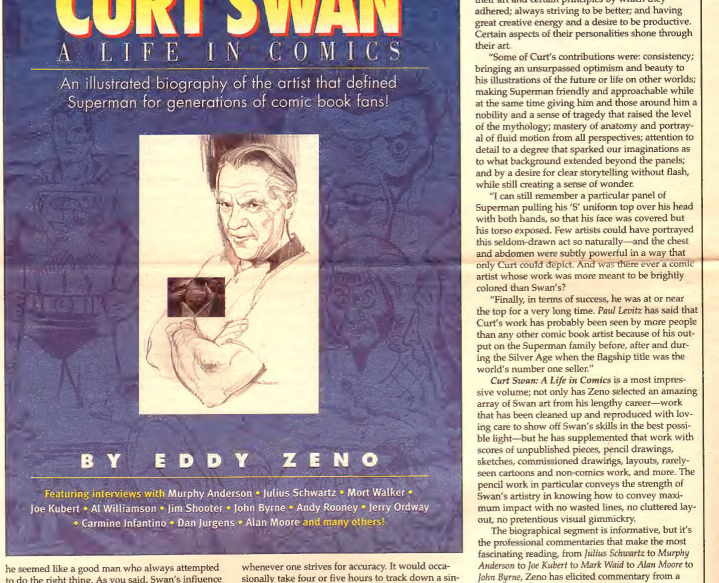
CSN the Spotlight!

Zeno's "Swan Song" a Joyous Ode

Talk about the great comic book artists, and names like *Jack Kirby, Will Eisner, Gil Kane, Steve Ditko,* and *Neal Adams* are often invoked—but few artists ever managed to define a hero for more than three decades the way *Curt Swan* did.

From the beginnings of the Silver Age (and, in fact, prior to that era's dawn) through the mid 1980s, *Curt Swan* was *the* Superman artist. And even though Swan's tenure on Superman ended more than a decade and a half ago, his contribution to the field is almost immeasurable. Even today, Swan's Superman is the quintessential visual rendition of the Man of Steel.

In *Curt Swan: A Life In Comics, Eddy Zeno* has demonstrated the incredible artistic acumen Swan displayed throughout his career while encouraging many of his fellow professionals to discuss his talents and his contributions. As Zeno displays in his book, however, Swan's Superman wasn't a static figure; instead, he changed with the times, maturing into the figure that many of us recall so fondly. "Superman's evolving appearance and storylines over sixty-plus years have mirrored the times in which he's appeared," Zeno explained. "Initially a tough-guy vigilante as portrayed by his creators, *Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster,* he became a barrel-chested hero powerful enough to run through outer space under artist *Wayne Boring*'s tutelage beginning in the late 1940s. But it was *Curt Swan*'s version of Superman that defined him as a friend, someone with whom kids could identify as a role model—not because he had those amazing powers, but because he seemed like a good man who always attempted to do the right thing. As you said, Swan's influence lasted for approximately thirty years, beginning in the mid-1950s until he handed the regular monthly books to his successors in 1986. The book demonstrates through both art and interviews how Swan's work influenced generations of fans."



While there are many appreciations and overviews of comic artists' careers on the bookshelves, *Curt Swan: A Life in Comics* is more than that—it is a biography of the artist, an analysis of his work, and a commentary on his accomplishments by friends, family, and fellow professionals, all of whom were eager to contribute to Zeno's impressive volume. "Putting together *Curt Swan: A Life In Comics* was something that had to be done in order to become part of the firmament, joining the other fine biographies that have been written about the great comic book artists. After having two articles about Swan published and with the encouragement of fellow fan *Raul Wrona* (who compiled a near complete index to Curt's work seen in the book's signed and numbered deluxe edition), I decided to forge ahead.

"The genesis for doing the book actually began around 1980, at which time I began to collect photocopies of rare and unpublished Swan art with the thought of exhibiting them someday; this was also shortly after I began corresponding with Curt. It helped to learn that the tremendously underrated talent behind The Man Of Steel was a humble and generous individual, living up to my hopes of what qualities he might exhibit."

Preparing the book became a true labor of love for Zeno, demanding "some twelve hundred documented hours since 1998. Prior to that, many more hours were spent in front of the typewriter and, eventually, the computer while writing the articles that were the genesis for the book. In addition, I can't officially claim the time spent rewriting things in my mind prior to falling asleep, or awakening in the middle of the night to jot down some inspiration that would come at the tail end of a dream.

"The research was, of course, exhaustive—as it is whenever one strives for accuracy. It would occasionally take four or five hours to track down a single panel of art to fit the text, or a week of evenings looking through scads of previous interviews with dozens of comics creators to find the one quote to back up a particular point. And anyone who's transcribed an interview knows how many times one has to replay the recording, line by line, to correctly quote someone."

The toughest part, Zeno said, was "putting myself in 'obsession mode' to get it right, because this might be my only shot at compiling such an extensive look at Swan and his work." The best part? "Having: *Arlen Schumer*'s brilliant color design of iconic images; the production values of Vanguard; the support of the Swan family and of so many others, especially the wonderful professionals who shared their feelings about Curt and his work; and especially to the black and white designer, *Jeff Weigel,* who made the thing look better than I could have imagined."

As Zeno sees it, Swan's strongest suit was his ability to "link the dichotomy of the Superman family mythos better than anyone. Over the years, people have written about one or the other, but I don't recall them mentioning how difficult it was to pull off both simultaneously. Swan portrayed a more utopian future, illustrated the most wondrous alien landscapes, imbued The Man Of Steel with a greater sense of heroism and gave the stories a more epic feel than his fellow artists. In contrast to drawing the most star-spanning adventures, Swan's sense of Americana when penciling more down-to-earth tales of Superman and his supporting cast earned him the title, 'The Norman Rockwell Of The Comics.'"

Zeno is certain that Swan deserves to be ranked alongside those aforementioned Silver Age greats. In fact, "That was the goal of *A Life In Comics,* to illuminate just why Curt deserves to be included in such an august group. If you think about it, each one of those artists contributed something unique to comics' Silver Age and beyond. Whether as artist/writer double threats, originators of memorable characters with lasting appeal, sequential panel innovators, or dynamite illustrators, they all forged different paths. Of course, they shared some qualities, such as: an inner drive to produce work of the highest quality; being true to themselves with their art and certain principles by which they adhered; always striving to be better; and having great creative energy and a desire to be productive. Certain aspects of their personalities shone through their art.

"Some of Curt's contributions were: consistency; bringing an unsurpassed optimism and beauty to his illustrations of the future or life on other worlds; making Superman friendly and approachable while at the same time giving him and those around him a nobility and a sense of tragedy that raised the level of the mythology; mastery of anatomy and portrayal of fluid motion from all perspectives; attention to detail to a degree that sparked our imaginations as to what background extended beyond the panels; and by a desire for clear storytelling without flash, while still creating a sense of wonder.

"I can still remember a particular panel of Superman pulling his 'S' uniform top over his head with both hands, so that his face was covered but his torso exposed. Few artists could have portrayed this seldom-drawn act so naturally—and the chest and abdomen were subtly powerful in a way that only Curt could depict. And was there ever a comic artist whose work was more meant to be brightly colored than Swan's?

"Finally, in terms of success, he was at or near the top for a very long time. *Paul Levitz* has said that Curt's work has probably been seen by more people than any other comic book artist because of his output on the Superman family before, after and during the Silver Age when the flagship title was the world's number one seller."

Curt Swan: A Life in Comics is a most impressive volume; not only has Zeno selected an amazing array of Swan art from his lengthy career—work that has been cleaned up and reproduced with loving care to show off Swan's skills in the best possible light—but he has supplemented that work with scores of unpublished pieces, pencil drawings, sketches, commissioned drawings, layouts, rarely-seen cartoons and non-comics work, and more. The pencil work in particular conveys the strength of Swan's artistry in knowing how to convey maximum impact with no wasted lines, no cluttered layout, no pretentious visual gimmickry.

The biographical segment is informative, but it's the professional commentaries that make the most fascinating reading, from *Julius Schwartz* to *Murphy Anderson* to *Joe Kubert* to *Mark Waid* to *Alan Moore* to *John Byrne*. Zeno has elicited commentary from a wide range of creators. The most fascinating commentary, though, comes from *Jim Shooter,* who shares his vivid memories of his work with Swan on Legion of Super-Heroes. And the contributions by Swan's family remind us all that Swan's art was only one particularly impressive facet of the man's life.

You might think that, after devoting more than a decade to the preparation of this work, Zeno has said all he has to say about Swan and his work—but Zeno is already "writing an article on how the Superman team of *Curt Swan/George Klein/Mort Weisinger/Edmond Hamilton* found magic during comics' Silver Age, emphasizing the latter two gentlemen's contributions more than was done in the book. Boy, talk about a one-track mind..."

Curt Swan: A Life in Comics is available from Vanguard Books in both hardcover ($34.95) and trade paperback ($19.95); any comic fan with an appreciation of the field's history will find it a fascinating read.

By popular demand, *CSN* offers a list of first issues, zero issues, and stand-alone single issues making their appearance in April. The First Faves choices are listed, followed by the remainder of the month's premiere issuese; each listing carries a Diamond Comic Distributors' code number after the publisher's name for each item. This way, if you're interested in an item that your friendly local comic shop doesn't routinely stock, you can tell them exactly how to locate and order it for you!

First Faves

(The best first issues April has to offer!)

➤ **411 #1** 4/9 Marvel FEB031371 $3.50
A number of creators—including some not normally seen in comics—offer stories built around a theme of peace

➤ **AGENTS #1** 4/30 Image FEB031190 $2.95
Kevin Gunstone & Ben Dunn pit a post-apocalyptic group of secret agents against the man responsible for the destruction of the twin capital cities, the villainous Professor Dandalus, who has reappeared on the world stage—but has he gone straight in his final days?

➤ **BATMAN: NEVERMORE #1** 4/2 DC FEB030143 $2.50
A 5-issue Elseworlds miniseries by Doug Moench, Guy Davis, & cover artist Bernie Wrightson that brings the World's Greatest Detective together with the inventor of the modern detective story: Edgar Allan Poe

➤ **BATTLE OF THE PLANETS/THUNDERCATS** Image FEB031251 $4.99
G-Force takes a mission to save a planet that is under attack by Spectra—New Thundera, home of the coveted ore, Thundrillium. Upon arrival, G-Force meets some unexpected allies who are also trying to fight off Spectra and save their planet - the Thundercats

➤ **BATTLE OF THE PLANETS: BATTLE BOOK** Image FEB031254 $4.99
The essential sourcebook for G-Force fans. Get inside Chief Anderson's files to read the inside scoop on your favorite Battle of the Planets characters, and learn more about the world of G-Force



➤ **BATTLE OF THE PLANETS: MARK ONE SHOT** Image FEB031253 $2.99
Colonel Cronus is a famous war hero whose aerial prowess is world renown. Mark, the leader of G-Force, idolizes Cronus while simultaneously hating his own father for abandoning him. But no one is perfect and there are secrets that even our heroes hide - even men as great as Colonel Cronus

➤ **BEWARE THE CREEPER #1** 4/16 Vertigo/DC FEB030217 $2.95
In this new 5-issue miniseries by Jason Hall & Cliff Chiang, a bizarre, colorful creature of the night stalks the streets of 1920s Paris: The Creeper. The enigmatic hero has her sights set on the upper class, but what are the true motivations behind The Creeper's actions?

➤ **BLACKSHADE COVENANT #1** 4/2 Dark Horse FEB030017 $2.99
Fabian Nicieza teams with Italian horror artist Stefano Raffaele, for the story of popular fantasy novelist Richard Kaine, author of a runaway bestseller—but unbeknownst to Richard, his book was really non-fiction. How could Richard have written about an event no one should have known about, because it was meticulously eradicated from human history?

➤ **BOOKER** 4/16 Image FEB031297 $9.95
Getting through high school is hard enough without being in love with the girl next door, especially when she just likes you only as a friend. But things can change, as Bruce Mutard's graphic novel reveals…

➤ **CALL #1** 4/2 Marvel FEB031372 $2.25
They saved Manhattan from certain doom…but will they be able to save themselves? Find out in this series by Chuck Austen & Patrick Olliffe

➤ **FRANKIE STEIN** IDW FEB032021 $19.99 by Strom T. Seigle & Marco Cinello *It's Halloween and all the kids in Transylvania, Pennsylvania are ready for a night of trick or treating. But when Frankie's father can't make good on his birthday wish, Frankie runs away from home. But in town Frankie finds a world full of monsters more scary looking than himself!*

➤ **HEIRS OF ETERNITY #1** Image FEB031209 $2.95
Jose L. Torres, Jae Tsai, & Jim Royal kick off a metaphysical adventure series

➤ **HUMAN TORCH #1** 4/9 Marvel FEB031325 $2.50
Karl Kesel and Skottie Young reignite that spark and refocus the FF's youngest, most impetuous member in this solo series

➤ **JLA: AGE OF WONDER #1** 4/9 DC FEB030173 $5.95
A two-issue Elseworlds miniseries examines how Superman's nineteenth century debut turns the Industrial Revolution on its ear!

➤ **KORE #1** 4/9 Image FEB031215 $2.95
Alex Crane has spent much of his life dodging responsibility. But when a big mistake curses him with the power of the Manitkore, Alex has the weight of two worlds on his shoulders

➤ **MIKE HOFFMAN'S LOST WORLDS OF FANTASY & SCI-FI #1** AntiMatter FEB031748 $2.95
New art and story by Mike Hoffman

➤ **MONKEY VS ROBOT AND CRYSTAL OF POWER** Top Shelf FEB032174 $14.95
When a short circuit burns out the power Crystal in one of Mother's Cognitive Reactors, the robots must find a replacement Crystal… but the one they dig up is a sacred relic from a monkey burial ground! Technology vs. Nature, Science vs. Religion, all wrapped up in this graphic novel by James Kochalka

➤ **MR. GUM ONE SHOT** 4/9 Oni FEB032086 $2.99
Mike Allred lets Mutant, Texas' J. Bone have all sorts of cartoony fun with the stretchy Mr. Gum

➤ **MUCHA LUCHA #1** 4/23 DC FEB030189 $2.25
Based on the hit Kids' WB! show with stories and covers by its creators! Honor, family, tradition…and donuts! It's the Code of Masked Wrestling, and it's a way of life for best friends Rikochet, Buena Girl and the Flea

➤ **MYSTIQUE #1** 4/23 Marvel FEB031329 $2.99
Brian K. Vaughan & Jorge Lucas kick off a solo series starring Mystique, who can be anything you want her to be… Mystique uses her shape-shifting abilities to further her own mutant rights agenda. And to get want she wants, she's not afraid to do whatever's necessary

➤ **NAMOR #1** 4/23 Marvel FEB031323 $0.15
Bill Jemas, Andi Watson, & Mitsuki Sakakibara bring the exotic undersea world of young Prince Namor to life in all of its lush and delicate splendor in this romantic tale of a young hero who finds love above the waves while gradually coming to terms with who he is

➤ **ORBITER** 4/23 Vertigo/DC FEB030227 $24.95
Warren Ellis teams up with Colleen Doran for this hardcover graphic novel that explores man's relationship with the last unexplored frontier: space. When a space shuttle missing for a decade zooms back to Earth with seemingly alien modifications and a missing crew, three specialists cheated out of their dreams of spaceflight are the only ones who can unravel the mysteries behind the bizarre situation

➤ **REBOUND VOL 1** 4/9 TokyoPop JAN032416 $9.99
The sequel to the popular Harlem Beat series. Sapporo has become overrun with thousands of student athletes all thirsting for the chance to come out victorious in Japan's Nation Basketball Championships. Representing Tokyo in the competition, The Jonan High School varsity basketball team

➤ **RUNAWAYS #1** 4/16 Marvel FEB031327 $2.50
When six young friends discover that their parents all share a deep, dark secret, the shocked teens find strength in one another and together run away from their homes and straight into the adventure of their lives in this series written by Brian K. Vaughan

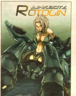
➤ **SENTINEL #1** 4/2 Marvel FEB031326 $2.99
Sean McKeever & Udon introduce Juston Seyfert, who is about to make a discovery that will change his life: the ravaged remains of a Sentinel buried in his family's salvage yard! But what could a downtrodden, disillusioned high school sophomore possibly do with a 30-foot tall engine of destruction? Anything he wants!

➤ **SHADES OF BLUE: THE NEW SERIES #1** 4/23 Digital Webbing FEB031897 $2.95
Heidi and the gang have their hands full when a mysterious force comes to school and starts possessing students. Now they'll have the difficult task of tracking down the creature as it jumps from body to body - at a masquerade party!

➤ **SHREK #1** 4/30 Dark Horse FEB030018 $2.99
The big green ogre makes his comics debut in a series by Mark Evanier, Ramon Bachs, & Raul Fernandez

➤ **SILENCERS #1** Moonstone FEB032049 $3.50
For decades The Silencers have been the super-powered enforcers of New York's Provenzano Crime Family, protecting them from 'The Tights.' When Cardinal, their fearsome leader, makes plans to retire from their life of crime, a rival syndicate makes a move against him in Moonstone's first superhero series, by Fred Van Lente & Steve Ellis

➤ **SOUL OF A SAMURAI #1** Image FEB031241 $3.95
A young samurai is forced to face his four inner daemons, each of whom represent a different piece of his soul, in this series by Will Dixon



➤ **SPYBOY 13.1: THE MANGA AFFAIR #1** 4/23 Dark Horse FEB030019 $2.99
The beautiful Yukio, A.K.A. SpyGirl, finds an old photograph on the set of her television show that throws her into a complete frenzy. Why was she photographed with Japan's Minister of Defense? More importantly, why doesn't she remember any of it? New Spyboy hijinx by Peter David & Pop Mhan

➤ **STAR WARS: JEDI SHAAK TI** 4/16 Dark Horse FEB030081 $4.99
Among the Jedi, Master Shaak Ti is known as a peacemaker; the calm voice of reason. But caught on the ground on war-torn Brentaal IV with a rapidly dwindling platoon of clone troopers, Shaak Ti is forced to go on the offensive

➤ **SUPERMAN: RED SON #1** 4/30 DC FEB030154 $5.95
An Elseworlds event by top-selling writer Mark Millar and artists Dave Johnson, Kilian Plunkett, & Andrew Robinson! When Krypton explodes, the infant Kal-El is rocketed to Earth where he lands on a Ukrainian farm during the 1950s! How will the Cold War effect the Man of Steel?

➤ **SWEATSHOP #1** 4/23 DC FEB030184 $2.95
Peter Bagge, Stephen DeStefano, & Bill Wray's series tells the uproarious story of Mel Bowling, a nationally syndicated cartoonist who hasn't touched his strip in years. Instead, he uses a stable of aspiring young artists, each with a different career goal!

➤ **THUNDERCATS/BATTLE OF THE PLANETS** 4/23 WildStorm/DC FEB030206 $4.95
The sudden appearance of a mystical portal between Earth and Thundera leads to chaos, confusion and adventure as Lion-O and Mark rally their troops against the combined might of the villainous Zoltar and Mumm-Ra. Also, check out the Battle of the Planets/Thundercats one-shot also shipping this month

➤ **TRANSFORMERS: GENERATION ONE VOL 2 #1** DreamWave FEB031907 $2.95
A new ruler seeks to unify Cybertron and transform the planet into a utopia. Both Optimus and Megatron must pledge allegiance to his order, or risk execution as war criminals

➤ **TRANSFORMERS: MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE—THE OFFICIAL GUIDE #1** DreamWave FEB031910 $5.25
This first chapter in an eight-part compendium gives you the lowdown on all your favorite robots in disguise

➤ **VENOM #1** 4/23 Marvel FEB031328 $2.25
Daniel Way and Francisco Herrera reintroduce one of Spider-Man's most deadly foes into the Marvel Universe

➤ **WOLVERINE: X-ISLE #1** 4/2 Marvel FEB031330 $2.50
Bruce Jones & Jorge Lucas present a new side of Logan. At a carnival with his stepdaughter Amika, Wolverine shows a violent side of himself that sends the young girl running. Unable to face what he's done, Wolverine is propelled into a soul-searching adventure he may not be able to escape

➤ **XIN: JOURNEY OF THE MONKEY KING #1** Anarchy FEB031728 $2.99
Picking up where the mini-series left off, Journey of the Monkey King tells the tale of Xin's attempt to set right all that he made wrong

➤ **X-MEN 2 MOVIE ADAPTATION** 4/2 Marvel FEB031336 $3.50
Chuck Austen & Patrick Zircher let you enjoy the May cinematic blockbuster a month before it hits theaters!

➤ **ZEN #0** Zen FEB032237 $2.95
Steve Stern & Bill Maus bring back the intergalactic adventurer in a new series

Fantastic Firsts

(Other April first issues)

➤ **ART & BEAUTY #1** Fantagraphics FEB031945 $4.95
Featuring 35 portraits of Crumb's ideal feminine forms

➤ **BATTLE OF THE PLANETS PINUP BOOK** DF FEB031919 $6.99

➤ **BUBBA REDNECK: WEREWOLF #1** Brass Ball FEB031812 $2.95

➤ **CATWOMAN: HE SAID/SHE SAID ONE SHOT** Eurocomics FEB031797 $3.50

➤ **COLOUR KAMIKAZE #1** Artwaests FEB031776 $29.95

➤ **COMICS EXPLORER VOL 2 #1** Blue Line FEB031807 $5.95
Spotlighting Grant Morrison

➤ **DAREDEVIL ACE ED SGN #1** Wizard FEB031673 $89.99

➤ **FEMFORCE: RAMPAGING SHE CAT #1** AC FEB031687 $6.95

➤ **FIREBALL XL5 #0** Misc Mayhem FEB032047 $2.95
Based on Gerry Anderson's classic Supermarionation series

➤ **GHOST IN THE SHELL II: MAN/MACHINE HOLD #1** 4/9 Dark Horse JAN030089 $10.00

➤ **GREMLIN EFFECT** Crusade FEB031890 $4.99
New series by Bill Tucci. In the summer of 1940, the Gremlins of Ashfordshire believe that the Royal Air Force has invaded their land - and they're not about to let a little thing like the Battle of Britain stand in their way

➤ **HARBINGER** Top Shelf FEB032179 $16.95

➤ **HENRY AND THE GOLEM #1** Golem.com FEB032136 $2.95
Online strip comes to comics

➤ **MYSTIQUE SGN #1** DF FEB031941 $29.99

➤ **NAGA VOL 1** Eurocomics FEB031943 $9.50

➤ **PAUL HAS A SUMMER JOB** D&Q FEB032903 $16.95

➤ **POSE FILE #1** Antarctic FEB031744 $22.95
192 page photo reference for artists

➤ **POSE FILE CD-ROM ED #1** Antarctic FEB031745 $29.95
Includes CD with digital versions of every photo

➤ **ROTOGIN: JUNKBOTZ #1** 4/23 Image FEB031234 $2.95
Kaylin Dakota enters into the shady world of illegal robot battles and underground gambling

➤ **SKUMM #1** 4/23 Deux Graphica FEB031894 $2.95
It's the year 2102, the sports stars of the future are S.K.U.M.M.… bio-engineered, nanotech enhanced former soldiers seeking fame and fortune in the arena of motorized medieval combat

➤ **STRANGE KADDISH: TALES YOU WON'T HEAR FROM BUBBIE** Aardwolf FEB031681 $9.95
Original stories by Neil Gaiman, Harlan Ellison, Bill Messner-Loebs, Clifford Meth, and others; illustrated by Gray Morrow, Dave Cockrum (X-Men), Mike Pascale, and others

➤ **STRANGER KADDISH: MORE WEIRD BUBBIE TALES** Aardwolf FEB031682 $12.95
Original stories by Neil Gaiman, Harlan Ellison, Peter David, Bill Messner-Loebs, Clifford Meth, and others; illustrated by Mike Pascale and others

➤ **THREE STRIKES #1** 4/23 Oni FEB032089 $2.99
The Skinwalker team of DeFilippis, Weir, & Hurtt is back with a new noir-edged series

➤ **TRANSFORMERS: GENERATION ONE VOL 2 #1 ALT CVR** DF FEB031921 $6.99

➤ **TRANSFORMERS: GENERATION ONE VOL 2 CHROME CVR #1** DreamWave FEB031908 $5.95

➤ **TWILIGHT X POCKET MANGA #1** Antarctic FEB031747 $14.95
Featuring Joseph Wight's Episodes 1-4, the Mangazine stories, and TX: Interlude #1-6 in a hefty 258 pages

➤ **ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN #1/2** DF FEB031926 $16.99

➤ **ULTIMATE X-MEN #1/2** DF FEB031927 $16.99

➤ **ULTIMATE X-MEN #1/2 QUESADA & MILLAR SGN** Wizard FEB031671 $89.99

➤ **UPS AND DOWNS #1** Radio FEB032104 $4.99

➤ **WEAPON X #1/2** DF FEB031928 $16.99

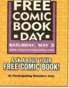
➤ **WEARING THE HORNS** Aardwolf FEB031680 $13.95
by Clifford Meth & Dave Cockrum

➤ **WELCOME TO THE DEATH CLUB** FS2 FEB031944 $17.95
Wordless brings forth in Welcome to The Death Club a series of wordless tales

➤ **WHIZ KIDS #1** 4/23 Image FEB031250 $4.95
In this Big Bang extravaganza by Gary Carlson & crew, it's Spring Break and the fab foursome head for Florida for fun in the sun… but you know what happens when super-sidekicks try to take a break!

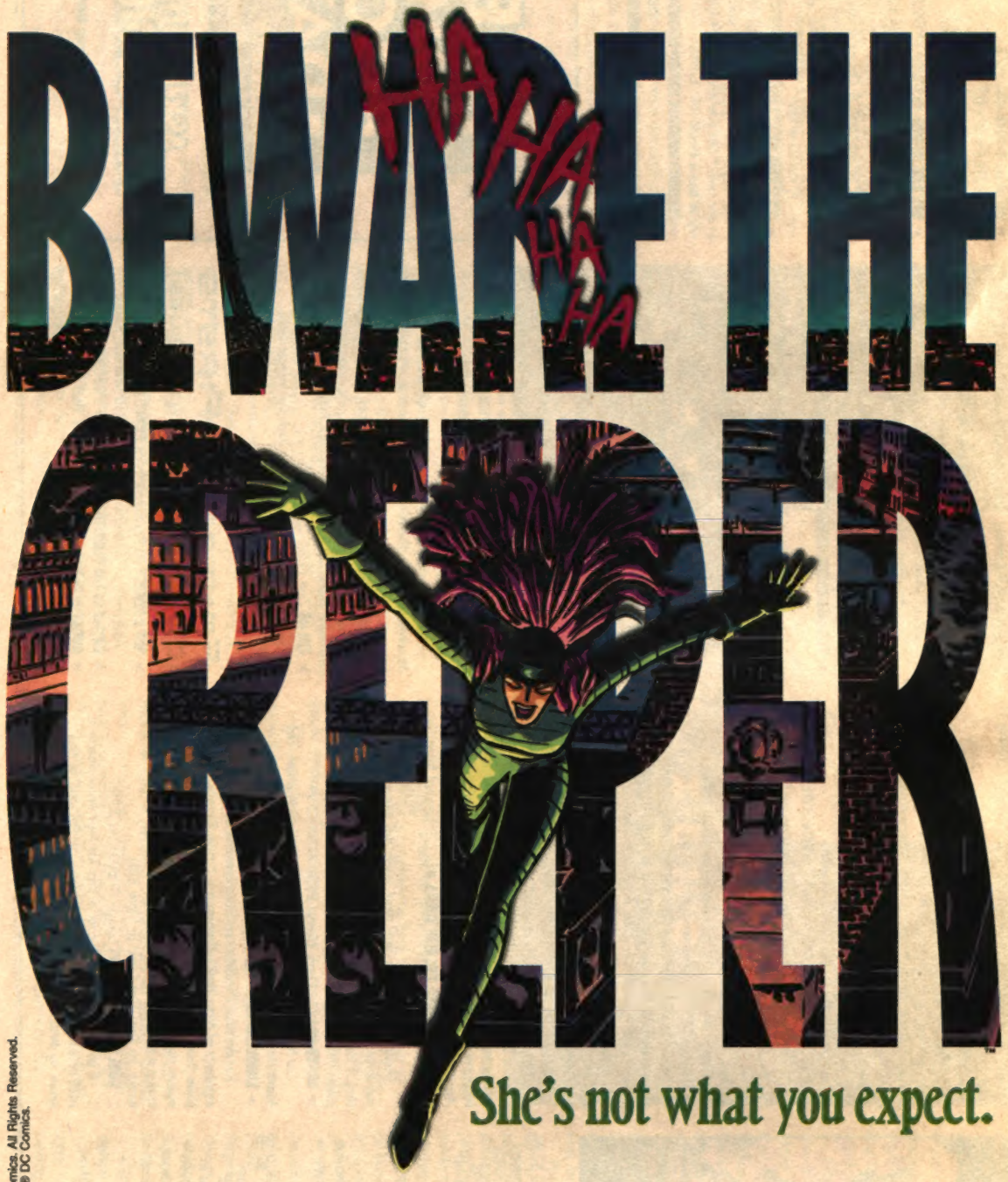
➤ **ZEBEDIAH HILLBILLY ZOMBIE REDNECK BITES THE DUST** Oddgod FEB032084 $10.95

➤ **ZEN, INTERGALACTIC NINJA #1 COMMEMORATIVE S&H EDITION** Zen FEB032239 $14.95



VERTIGO's shocking take on DC's strangest character.

BEWARE THE CREEPER



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